



February 03, 2021

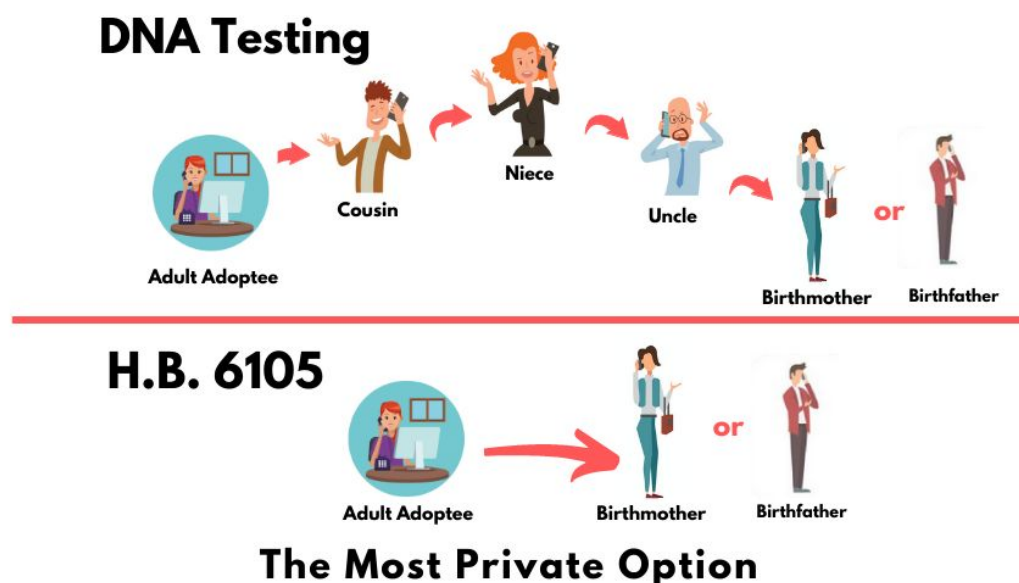
Dear Co-Chairs Senator Cassano and Representative McCarthy Vahey, Vice-Chairs Senator Needleman and Representative Goupil, Ranking Members Senator Hwang and Representative Zullo and Distinguished Members of the Planning & Development Committee:

My name is Desiree Stephens and I'm an adoptee. I support House Bill 6105: An Act Concerning Adult Adoptees' Access To Original Birth Records. **I believe it is a basic human and civil right for every person to know his or her biological origins and that both adoptees and non-adoptees deserve equal protection under the law.** The current law in Connecticut governing the administration of original birth certificate requests by adult adopted persons is discriminatory. I believe there needs to be one fair and consistent policy for everyone no matter their age or circumstances at birth. I urge the legislature to enact House Bill 6105 because it makes all adult adoptees born before October 1, 1983 equal under the same law that governs all non-adoptees and adoptees born *after* October 1, 1983.

I feel strongly about this bill because I have personally experienced the indignation of a similarly discriminatory policy that was in place until only last year in the state where I was born, New York. At a time in my life when I desperately needed to know more about my identity and my birth family, I sought information that was rightfully mine, including my original birth certificate. Perhaps the most inhumane part of that process was how many outside people needed to know about my life and my story as I sought the information I needed. I endured a ton of unnecessary roadblocks along the way and I would have escaped years of self-doubt and shame had social workers and other authorities been able to give me my original birth certificate. Each time I received a letter signed and dated by another human being who could know information about my life that I was not allowed to know, I felt dehumanized. I felt less than. It robbed me of the self-empowerment non-adopted people are afforded just by nature of coming by their identities without this adversity.

I want to offer up an additional expertise to you regarding the consumer-DNA industry, particularly how adult adoptees and birth parents are using it to circumvent the current law and why it matters. I can speak to this because I did it. Through a third-cousin match on 23andMe, I was able to identify my birthfather. Many adoptee rights advocates who have been fighting for equal rights laws for years say they never thought they'd see a day when it's considered *more* private to restore adoptees' rights to their original birth certificates than not. That day is here and given the advent and rise of consumer-DNA, I think that day has been here for a few years.

So, here's what happens. Usually after expensive and time consuming searches with adoption agencies that don't produce any real results,¹ adoptees are exhausted from all the friction and finally resign themselves to doing a DNA test. They can purchase a DNA kit easily online or even in the checkout line at a local pharmacy (I've seen them in Walgreens before). It costs anywhere between \$50 - \$150 per kit and there are four major companies that make up the 1.26 billion personal genomics market.² Many adoptees— becoming so fed up with having tried to do their searches “the right way” with no results— opt to cast the widest net possible and will do all four however Ancestry DNA is the largest database and holds about 2/3 of the entire market. Once they purchase the kit and receive it, they spit in a small tube and then send it back to the company. Within a few weeks, they receive an email welcoming them to the database and introducing them to an average of 1500 of their closest relatives. Here's a little chart of what happens next:



Basically, they start talking to their new relatives. In a 2019 study that reached statistical significance, 92% of adoptees found a half-second cousin or closer when they tested³ so most adoptees can expect to find a half-second cousin or closer (first-cousin, aunt, uncle, sibling or even a parent) the first time they do a DNA test. Adoptees can also expect to find a robust community of people online to help them decipher their DNA results and connect the dots to determine where they fit in on the family tree. It is worth noting that DNA companies invest heavily in their online products often helping users connect directly with each other. They

¹ At one point in my search I had a document from NY Dept of Vital records that told me my mother never signed an “instrument of surrender” and a document from Catholic Charities telling me she signed relinquishment papers on 08/04/1984. After many months and a lot of friction, Catholic Charities admitted they lied to me. From my 10+ years in the adoptee community, I learned I’m not the minority when it comes to the truthfulness or intent of many adoption agencies to be of any real help during a search.

² [Consumer Genomics Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report](#), Grandview Market Research, Jul 2019

³ [Adoptee Success Using DNA Testing: Mid-2019 Analysis](#), Blaine T. Bettinger, Ph.D., J.D.

proactively send them emails when there are new interesting conclusions (ie. “You have 85 new relatives this month!”) and they maintain community forums for users to contact each other either to discuss their new relation or to learn more about how to use the database. On top of that, well trafficked social media sites like Facebook have community groups to help adoptees find their families through DNA. One group is called [DNA Detectives](#) and it has over 150,000 very active members! I’ve personally seen them solve 30 year old cases in a matter of minutes.

So, what’s the problem with using DNA? Well, for one thing it’s not private. Adoptees have to endure the humiliation of telling their story over and over again to strangers just so they can figure out the truth. We don’t *want* to do it, we feel we *have* to do it. I can personally attest, it’s degrading. By the time they get to their birth parents, many people along the way have been made aware of that birth parents’ story. There is little dignity to this process, its very public and adoptees feel like they are forced to do it. If the only reason we have to keep the current discriminatory law in place is because we think we’re protecting someone, the hard reality is we’re not. In fact, we’re leaving them exposed and subjected to being publicly discovered. DNA doesn’t discriminate and neither should the law. I believe adoptees have a fundamental right to know where they came from and they have a right to discover this information in the most private and humane way possible.

I’ve seen this legislature struggle with this issue for the last five years and I sympathize with you. I know you don’t want to do harm but *not* taking action *is* a decision and it has a consequence. That 1 birthmother out of 2000⁴ who doesn’t want to reconnect with her adult son or daughter...she is at risk *right this very minute*. Doing nothing is keeping her at risk of being publicly exposed. I want to empower and reassure you that restoring adoptees rights is the most private option possible. The numbers are staggering. Over 25 million people have taken a consumer-DNA test according to an article published in 2019, it’s predicted that within 2 years (that’s right now!) over a third of the country will have tested.⁵ If adoptees aren’t doing DNA, their young adult children are doing it and finding that 1 birthmother (who is their birth-grandmother). Genetic anonymity simply does not exist and won’t ever exist again. Let’s do the best we can for her and all the adult adoptees who are running out of time to reconnect with their families, something most of them need in order to heal from having been separated through adoption.

I have one last thing to share regarding health histories. I want you to know my own truth came to me at the expense of time, time that H.B. 6105 will restore to adult adoptees and their families. I was 30 years old when I found out my birth mother had passed away from a malignant brain tumor. She had presented at a doctor’s office with ‘just a migraine’ only three weeks prior to her death. She was 47 years old. We never reunited. It’s heartbreaking by itself to have never reunited because she died so young, but it’s almost criminal that had I not gone to extraordinary

⁴ [Statistics for states implementing access to original birth certificate laws](#). American Adoption Congress, Feb. 2016

⁵ [More than 26 million people shared their DNA with ancestry firms, allowing researchers to trace relationships between virtually all Americans: MIT](#), Health Tech Matters, CNBC, Feb. 2019

lengths to find my family, I would have been deprived of this health history. Adoptees have a right to seek the best possible healthcare they can get for themselves and their children and that includes a complete and up to date health history. We are not exempt from human health conditions just because we've been separated from our genetic relatives. It is common knowledge doctors provide better and more complete care when they have patients' medical histories. This is why the [Connecticut State Medical Society](#) supports House Bill 6105. Adoptees do not deserve to be limited to lifelong sub-par medical care because of our circumstances at birth.

For all these reasons, implementing a more consistent government policy restoring rights to all adult adoptees regarding access to their own birth certificate is the right thing to do. Please support H.B. 6105, An Act Concerning Access To Original Birth Records By Adult Adopted Persons.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Desiree Stephens".

Desiree Stephens

Member, Board of Directors, Access Connecticut Now, Inc.

desiree.stephens@accessconnecticut.org

703-980-0224